

ABOUT THE COURSE...

Some Guiding Questions

What is *philosophy*?

Philosophy is the discipline that considers the BIG issues/questions by means of constructing and evaluating arguments that have to do with the BIG issues/questions

What is *ancient Greek* philosophy?

A consideration of the way in which certain philosophers *from a particular historical, cultural and linguistic context* have wondered about the BIG issues/questions.

Why study ancient Greek philosophy?

Not only is their historical and philosophical legacy are monumental, but in some cases their ideas may even be superior to the ones produced by modern thinkers.

How will we go about studying ancient Greek philosophy?

This course will present a dialectical overview of ancient Greek philosophy from approximately 585 – 300 BCE.

THE BIRTH OF PHILOSOPHY

The Move From Poetry to Philosophy

The story of philosophy begins with poetry...

- Before there was philosophy, there was poetry... before there were philosophers, there were 'myth-makers'
- The poets held a central position in Greek culture... they developed, preserved and conveyed the historical, scientific and religious truths of the time.
- The poets explained the world and man's place in it (that is, they considered the BIG issues/questions) through various 'myths' (or stories)
- These myths were used to explain most (if not all) cosmogonical, cosmological and ethical issues/questions.
- Moreover, since the poets were thought to be inspired by the muses, the accounts put forward were taken to be authoritative

HOMER

Approx. 750 BCE

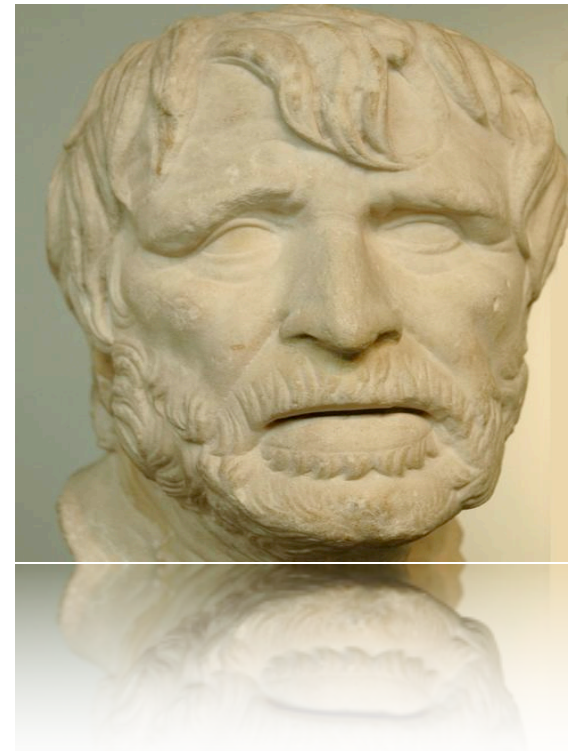
- Poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* tell the story of the Trojan war and of Odysseus' return from Troy
- Most influential poet... "All at first have learned from Homer" (Xenophanes)
- Homer's poems suggest several broad conceptions of the nature of reality and man's place in it.
- The natural order - What we find in nature is the product of the steady purposes and aims of the gods. However, the god's are often unpredictable
- The moral ideal – Homer's virtues were the virtues of the warrior hero... preserving and enhancing success, honor, excellence



HESIOD

Approx. 700 BCE

- His poem the *Theogony* recounts the origin of the gods, as well as the earth, sea, sky and physical world
- “Tell me these things, Olympian muses, from the beginning, and tell which of them came first... In the beginning there was only Chaos, the abyss, but then Gaia, the earth, came into being. Her broad bosom the ever firm foundation of all, and Tartaros, dim in the underground depths, and Eros, loveliest of all the immortals...”
- Hesiod’s poem begins with an invocation to the muses, thus implying that human logos (‘reason’) is incapable of understanding—on it’s own—the true nature of reality.



THE MYTHOLOGICAL WORLD

Some Problems and Concerns

- The emergence of the written word slowly lead to the questioning of the mythological accounts of Homer and Hesiod
- Writing, by freezing the poet's myths into standard versions, not only changed the mental habits of some individuals but gradually made most people increasingly uncomfortable with the myths put forward to explain the origin and structure of reality
- For example, Xenophanes criticisms attacked the traditional Greek conception of the gods put forward by Homer and Hesiod: "Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is shameful and reproachable among men"

